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Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7695
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CINCUSNAVEUR
COMIDEASTFOR

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT LOUIS 0886

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, MP
SUBJECT: MAURITIUS QUARTERLY POLITICAL ASSESSMENT- AUGUST 1, 1978
SUMMARY

REF: PORT LOUIS A-66

1. PARAGRAPHS BELOW SUMMARIZE REFERENCE AIRGRAM, WHICH IS FIRST OF A NEW SERIES OF REPORTS BEING ORIGINATED BY THIS EMBASSY.

2. DURING THE PAST QUARTER BOTH OF THE OPPOSED MAJOR POLITICAL GROUPINGS OF MAURITIUS -- THE GOVERNING ALLIANCE OF THE LABOR PARTY AND THE MAURITIAN SOCIAL DEMOCARTIC PARTY (PMSD), AND THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM) -- CONFIDENTIAL

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HAVE LOST SUPPORT IN THE ELECTORATE. THE MMM HAS PROBABLY LOST SOMEWHAT MORE SUPPORT THAN HAS THE GOVERNING ALLIANCE, BUT A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF VOTERS HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR DISILLUSIONMENT WITH BOTH GROUPS BY ABSTAINING IN LARGE NUMBERS IN THE TWO MUNICIPAL BY-ELECTIONS HELD DURING THIS PAST QUARTER.

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3. THE MMM VOTE FELL BY SEVEN PER CENT IN BOTH
THE CUREPIPE AND VACOAS BY-ELECTIONS, WHILE THE
ALLIANCE'S SUPPORT INCREASED BY 5.5 PER CENT AND
8 PER CENT RESPECTIVELY. THESE ELECTIONS, THE
FIRST IN MORE THAN A YEAR, THUS SHOWED A DECIDED
SHIFT IN VOTER SENTIMENT TOWARD THE GOVERNING
COALITION. EXPLANATIONS FOR THE MMM SLIPPAGE
INCLUDE ITS POOR PERFORMANCE IN THE ASSEMBLY
AS THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION, INTERNAL DISSENSION
WHICH HAS RESULTED IN TWO MMM DEPUTIES LEAVING
THE MMM TO JOIN THE LABOR PARTY AND POTENTIAL FURTHER
DEFECTIONS BY HINDU DEPUTIES DISILLUSIONED WITH
THE MMM, IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICT WITHIN THE PARTY WHICH
HAS SEEN THE LEFT-WING ELEMENT WITHDRAW FROM PARTY
LEADERSHIP ROLES, AND A LOSS OF CREDIBILITY AS A
POTENTIAL ALTERNATIVE GOVERNMENT MAINLY AS A RESULT
OF THE "SHEIK HOSSEN AFFAIR," IN WHICH MMM LEADER
BERENGER RELIED ON THE CONFESSIONS OF A PSYCHOPATHIC
LIAR TO TRY TO BRING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT, AN EFFORT
WHICH BACKFIRED WHEN THE CONFESSOR'S STORY WAS
EXPOSED AS ENTIRELY FALSE OR FABRICATED. THE GOVERN-
MENT SIDE HAS ALSO SUCCEEDED IN PINNING A PRO-
SOVIET/CUBAN LABEL ON THE MMM, AND ALBERT RENE'S
OPTING FOR THE SINGLE PARTY SYSTEM FOR THE SEYCHELLES
HAS HURT THE MMM HERE, AS MAURITIANS FEAR THE MMM
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WOULD COPY RENE IF THEY CAME TO POWER.

4. TO COUNTER THE SLIPPAGE THE MMM LEADERSHIP HAS
TRIED TO RESTORE THE PARTY'S IMAGE AS ONE SUPPORTING
"LAW AND ORDER," ESPECIALLY AFTER 15 OF ITS MILITANTS
WERE JAILED IN LATE JULY FOR VIOLATING THE PUBLIC
ORDER ACT(POA) BY INCITING CROWDS TO VIOLENCE
AND HOLDING ILLEGAL DEMONSTRATIONS. THIS HAS BEEN
COUPLED WITH A CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE POA AS BEING
UNDEMOCRATIC. BERENGER HAS USED A NUMBER OF FORA
TO TRY TO CONVINCE THE PUBLIC THAT THE MMM'S FOREIGN
POLICY IS NOT PRO-SOVIET BUT RATHER ONE OF BALANCE
AND EQUIDISTANCE BETWEEN THE TWO POWER BLOCS.
FOR THE FIRST TIME HE HAS PUBLICLY CRITICIZED THE
USSR ON A NUMBER OF COUNTS, AND HE CANCELLED
ATTENDANCE AT THE HAVANA YOUTH FESTIVAL BY A MMM
DELEGATION IN ORDER TO AVOID CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH
THE CUBANS AND THEIR SOVIET ALLIES.

5. INTERNAL DISSENSION HAS ALSO PLAGUED THE LABOR
PARTY IN RECENT MONTHS, AS THE DISSIDENT BOODHOO
GROUP HAVE CHALLENGED THE PARTY LEADERSHIP TO CARRY

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OUT A NUMBER OF REFORMS IN ORDER TO REFURBISH THE PARTY'S IMAGE. THUS FAR PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM HAS MANEUVERED SUCCESSFULLY TO CONTAIN THE DAMAGE AND HAS OBTAINED THE DISSIDENTS' SUPPORT AT CRUCIAL POINTS IN ORDER TO GET THE GOVERNMENT'S BILLS AND BUDGET ADOPTED IN THE ASSEMBLY, ALTHOUGH ON ONE OCCASION IN APRIL RAMGOOLAM FOUND HIMSELF ON THE MINORITY SIDE IN PARLIAMENT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS CAREER. THE EMERGENCE OF THE DISSIDENTS ENCOURAGED SOME JOCKEYING AMONG RAMGOOLAM'S ASSOCIATES, GEARING UP FOR A STRUGGLE TO SUCCEED HIM AS LEADER OF THE COUNTRY, BUT THE PRIME MINISTER DOES NOT SEEM INCLINED TO STEP DOWN JUST YET, DESPITE HIS AGE (78) AND HEALTH PROBLEMS. AT THE ANNUAL LABOR PARTY CONGRESS THE "OLD GUARD" RETAINED THEIR POWER ON THE EXECUTIVE. BOODHOO, DESPAIRING OF
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REFORMING THE PARTY BY DIRECT CHALLENGES, HAS NOW SET OFF ON A THREE-MONTH "PILGRIMAGE" TO TRY TO MOBILIZE GRASS ROOTS SUPPORT FOR HIS REFORM EFFORT.

6.THE PMSD COALITION PARTNER HAS INCREASED ITS LEVERAGE OVER THE LABOR PARTY SOMEWHAT, AS A RESULT OF HAVING GIVEN IMPORTANT SUPPORT TO THE ALLIANCE CANDIDATES IN THE TWO MUNICIPAL BY-ELECTIONS. IT HAS ALSO LED THE PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE MMM FOR ITS ALLEGED COMMUNIST CONNECTIONS. AS THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IS IN RECESS FOR FOUR MONTHS, THE INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION IS LIKELY TO REMAIN STABLE FOR THE COMING QUARTER, AND A SPIRIT OF "DETENTE" APPEARS TO BE EMERGING BETWEEN THE MMM AND THE GOVERNMENT. BUT INTERNAL DISSENSION WITHIN BOTH PARTY GROUPINGS CONTINUES TO FESTER AND MAY BREAK OUT IN NEW FORMS AFTER NOVEMBER.
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